

In Support of SB 1035 and HB 6425

Testimony from George Kain
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My name is Dr. George Kain. I am an Associate Professor in the Division of Justice and Law Administration at Western Connecticut State University. Prior to my teaching at Western CT, I was a CT Adult Probation Officer and a Judicial Branch administrator for 12 years. I am currently a Police Commissioner in the Town of Ridgefield, and have been for 12 years. My personal view of the Death Penalty (DP) has changed significantly over the years, and I have come to find through discussing this issue with my Law Enforcement (LE) colleagues that many of them share the exact same concerns that I have, and they too support abolition.

Recent debate in opposition to the DP has focused on wrongful conviction and on the risk of innocent people being put to death- these are certainly strong, valid arguments. Wrongful convictions for any offense are a black eye for all of in the Criminal Justice System because our credibility suffers- and has suffered- as a result. One of the main concerns shared by many of my LE colleagues focuses on the economic side of this debate. Not only are precious financial resources wasted on a DP process which leads to a punishment so infrequently applied and even less frequently carried out- but the DP also takes away time and resources from the effective prevention and intervention programs that we know work in our law enforcement efforts.

Additionally, the millions of dollars that we could divert to these effective programs could also be used to provide additional training for our LE officers and for increased victim services; two areas in our CJS that we know could use strengthening. We need to do more for surviving family members of violent crime, and we can do more. In fact, it was the focus on increased funding for officer training as well as for increased funding for victim services that led the Illinois legislature to pass their anti-death penalty bill earlier this year. My fear is, that given our current financial crisis, not only will we continue to waste money on a punishment that isn't cost effective; we could continue to see further reductions in our LE workforce that have actually already begun through recent layoffs of police officers, and also have less money available for victim services. I don't have to wave a flag of concern over the validity of these issues; they are clearly before us for all to see.

If we knew that the DP worked, we'd be having a totally different discussion right now, but in the 35 years since it's reinstatement in the country in 1976, we have seen again and again that it doesn't work, and further, that we don't need it. In the words of former USSC Justice Harry Blackmun, "the death penalty experiment has failed". LE doesn't need the DP, the State of CT doesn't need the DP, and our country doesn't need the DP. The DP has failed all of us. CT can join the other states in this great country that are currently abolishing the DP. You can make that happen this legislative term and I hope that you will.